

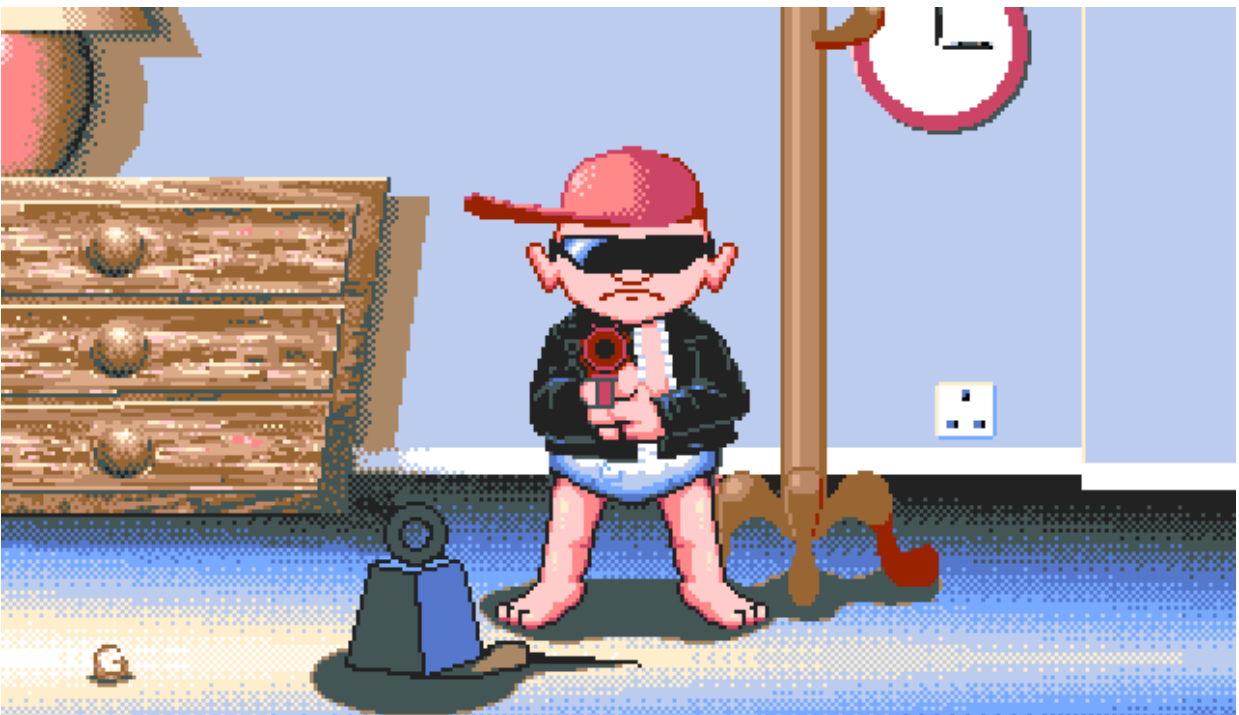
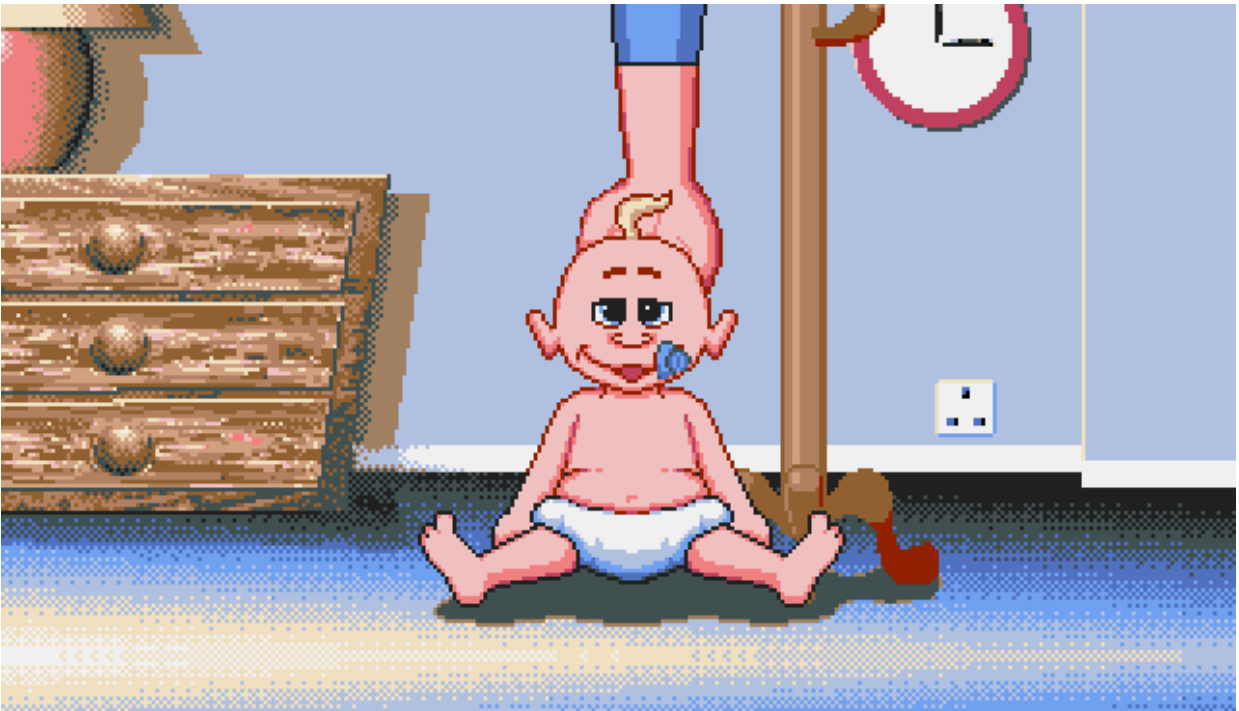
I want your nappy, your booties, and your tricycle

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

In polite company baby Nathan is a placid, good-natured, lovable bundle of sugar and spice and all things nice. When his parent's bedtime rolls around and he's out of the spotlight, Dr Jekyll becomes Mr Hyde. Retreating to 'Bratland' the devil within is awoken - it's certainly a 'Strange Case'.

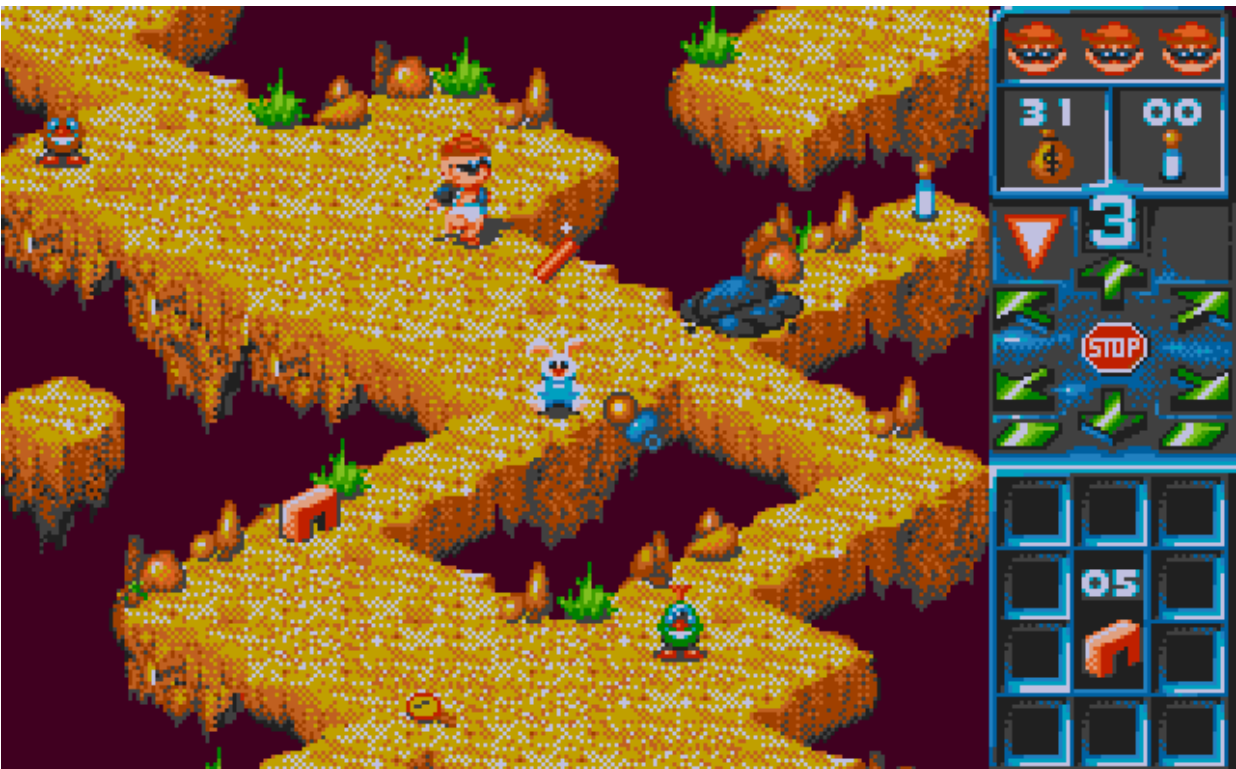
Away from the watchful gaze of his doting mummy Nathan crushes his clockwork mouse with an Acme dead weight, dons a leather biker's jacket, sunglasses and baseball cap and transforms into the super Brat of the title.



Although the magazine reviews at the time alluded to Nathan slipping into a deep, dreamy slumber, suggesting that Bratland is imaginary, it's not entirely clear that's the

case judging by the introductory animation or blurb on the back of the box. Nevertheless, since the manual is missing in action we may as well run with it, unless you have any better suggestions? Maybe you went to school with Nathan years later and he talked about his adventures? Does he have an autobiography we could check?

As in CTA's Sleepwalker released two years later, you must chaperone the little darling to safety through his somnambulistic odyssey. Unlike Ralph, however, you don't make an appearance on screen personally, and can't control Nathan directly. Instead, commands must be placed onto his isometric dreamland for Nathan to toddle across. Selected from the menu to the right of the playfield these modify his direction as well as impacting his immediate environment, for instance, by detonating inconvenient obstacles.



Emerging in April 1991 only two months after the original Lemmings game exploded (literally) onto the small screen,

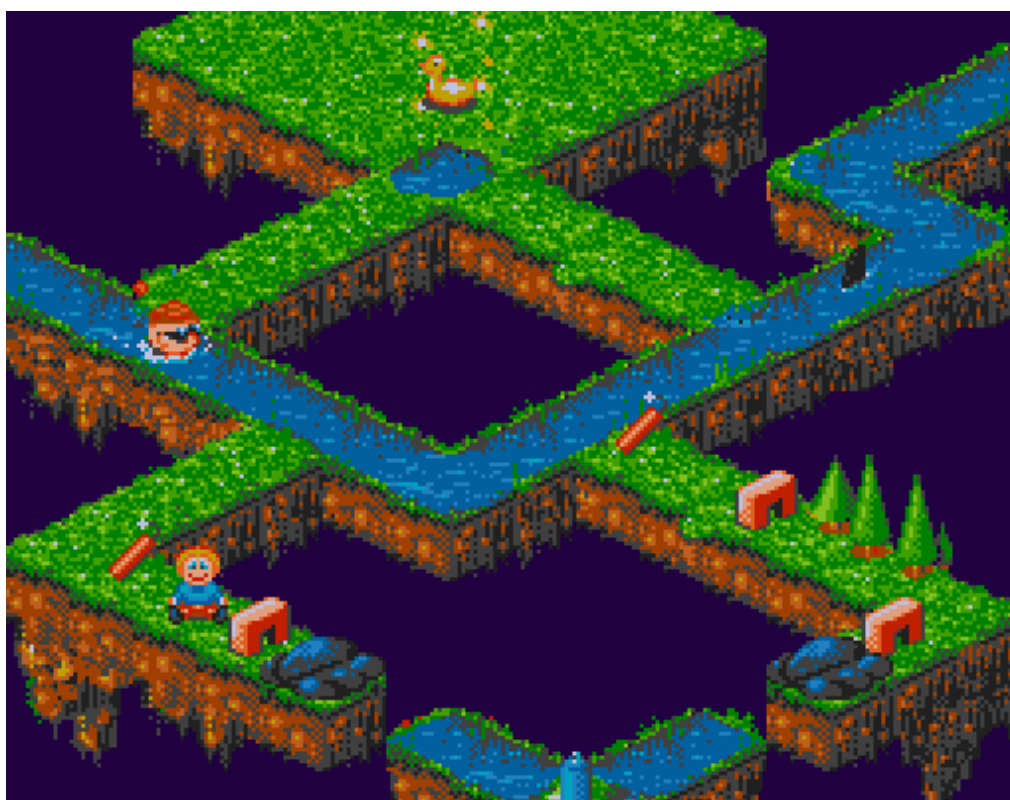
it's difficult to say how much of an influence was made by the game that put Psygnosis on the map. At first glance at least Brat is rather like an off-kilter bird's eye re-imagining of DMA's mythically suicidal title. Nevertheless, it's an exerted stretch to call it a clone or rip-off, especially given that the developers are unlikely to have played Lemmings when they commenced work on their own creation.



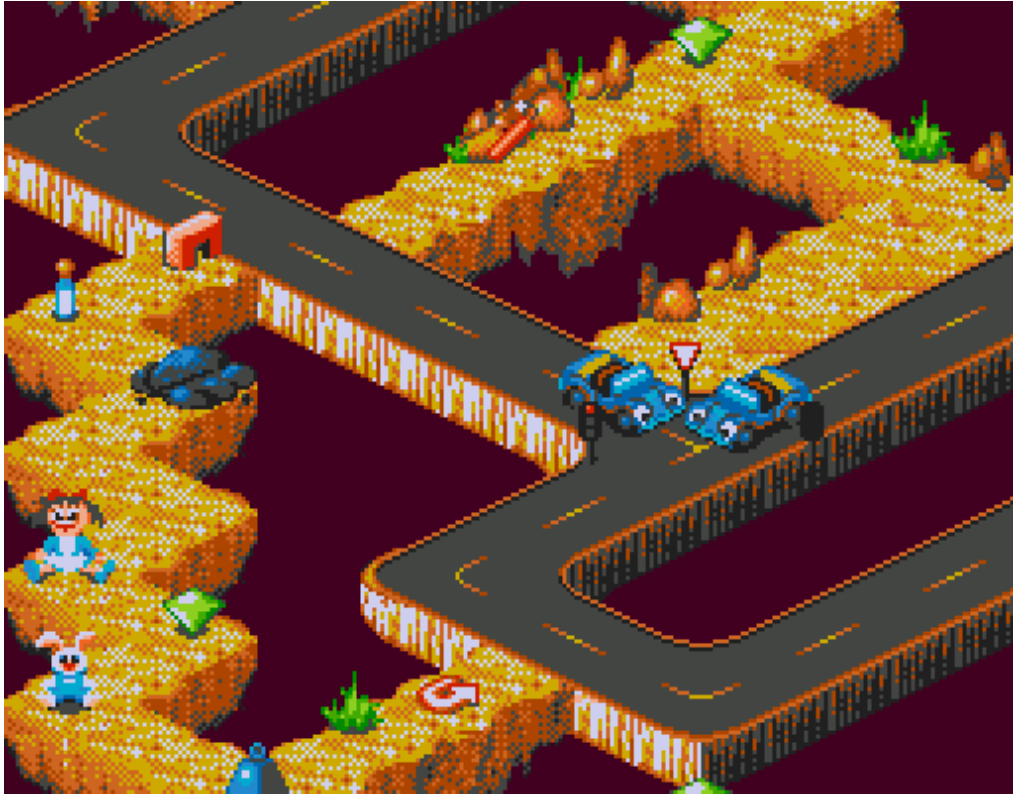
In Brat you have a single, clueless, accident-prone dependent to steer, whilst the options available to manipulate his behaviour are fairly limited. Mostly you'll be laying down arrows to switch Nathan's direction as he trudges mindlessly forwards. Each instruction costs you one unit of currency, topped up by scavenging gold coins and

jewels from the landscape. Arrows can't be reused as you might peel a magnet off the fridge, although they *can* be erased prior to being trampled on, saving you cash and a potentially deadly mistake.

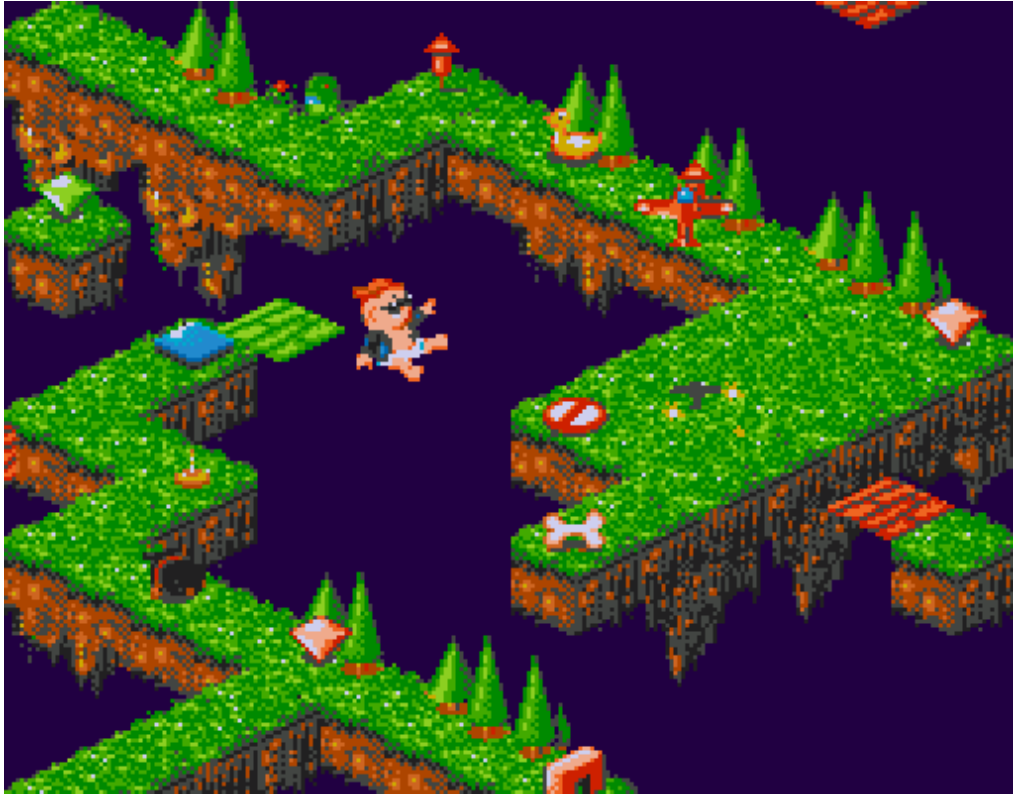
On other occasions planting bridges will be required to, erm, *bridge* gaps, preventing the little cherub from toppling over the edge of a precipice into the bottomless chasm that lies below his Escher-esque levitating terrain.



Some threats to the chump's well-being occur on the land itself. These can take the form of desktop pecking bird toys that reverse Nathan's direction, a Jack in the box sufficient to scare him over a precarious ledge, and cars which can GTA you to death if you misjudge your timing when crossing the road.



If you think you'll be able to negotiate your way around these hazards at your leisure, think again! There's no time to stop and ponder your next action because the screen continually and automatically scrolls downwards, obliging you to keep pace with it. Should it overtake Nathan he's a goner since you have no way of seeing what pitfalls await, or of placing commands in an area outside of your Populousy purview.



To progress beyond the nursery onto the park and eventually outer space you'll need lightning-quick reflexes. Only if you're able to think three or four steps ahead, stacking commands as in a more destructive RTS affair, will you be able to keep Nathan on the right track. Very *narrow* tracks with little margin for error. Work (and make no mistake, it *is* work) too closely to Nathan and often he'll hit your waypoint markers too late and blithely stroll across them. I suppose you *could* argue that's all part of the challenge and learn to adapt accordingly. Alternatively, throw a tantrum, pound your fists on your keyboard and chunner something about bad AI. It's your call.

Analogous to the green-haired brigade, Nathan is determined to die, only in Brat, you have just one chance to get it right. You can't rescue 77% of a single baby. This *isn't* a surgical procedure, it's a wholly *more* intricate operation.

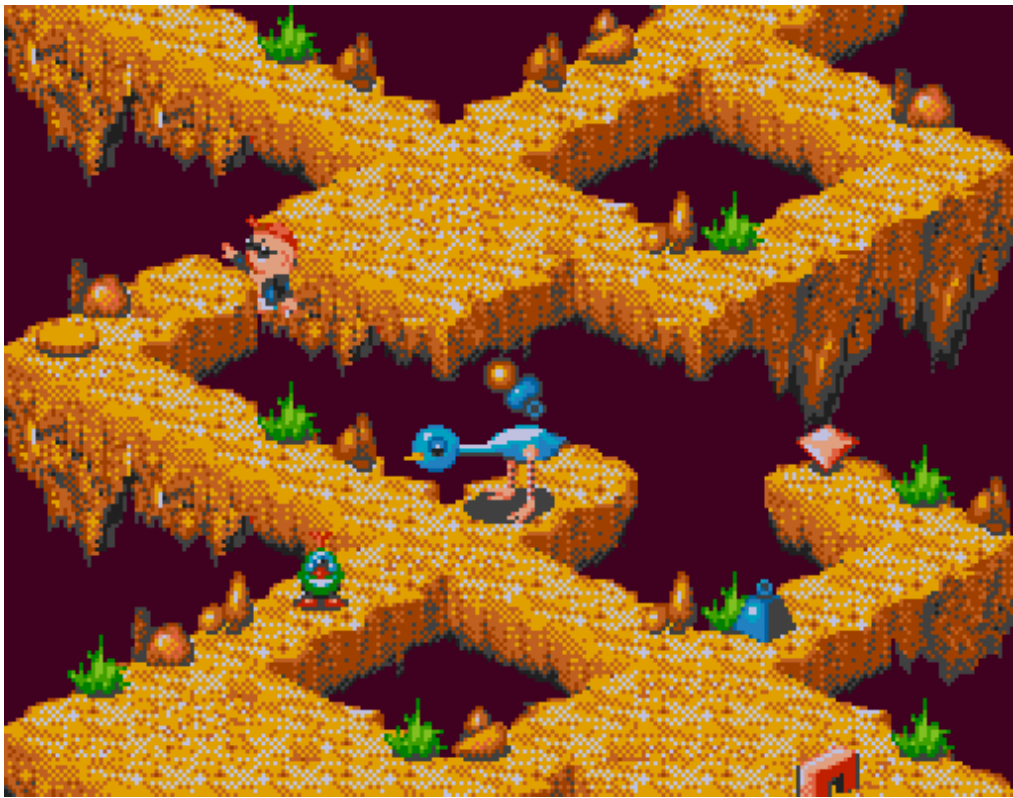


Luckily you *do* have a few tricks up your unseen sleeve. Triangles halt the auto-scroll mechanism for ten seconds, while Nathan marches on. On the flip side, a strategically aligned stop sign immobilises Nathan without affecting the screen's scroll rate. This buys you some essential breathing space in particularly congested areas, enabling you to cue instructions before he reanimates. It's even possible to reverse the scroll direction of the screen in order to backtrack and gather missed collectables.

You begin with a measly three lives with which to complete the 12 sprawling stages, so will need to make a dash for the milk bottle restart points at every opportunity. Otherwise, you're sent right back to square one of a given level to try

again. Passwords are earned whenever you successfully master a level so that they can be returned to later, dead baby or not.

Dynamite is used to clear the path of any rocks, and a carefully placed weight keeps Jack in his box. As with many of the hostile death-bringers, avoiding the guillotine effect of the pecking birds instead demands evasive action and precision timing.



Even so, not everything that gets in Nathan's way will harm him. Hit certain blockades and he'll rebound, change direction and continue walking in the opposite direction, rather like those toy cars they'd have in a walled playpen at Toys 'r' Us before they went belly up. Speaking of which, new toys for Nathan to play with, appropriately are dropped by a gliding stalk once you have completed a level. Nathan celebrates with a spot of baby twerking, wiggling his butt-tocks so much his nappy falls down. Luckily he's facing away

from the camera at the time. No-one needs to see *that* animated.

Should you struggle to get the hang of it the developers - Foursfield - kindly included rolling demos of each level to give you some pointers. A nice touch that I'm sure won't help one iota to make the game any less infuriatingly head-banging. And speaking of pointers and nice touches, in Brat our cursor is a dummy. How appropriate. It's often the attention to detail that makes a game stand out; the team who delivered Brat to publishers, Mirrorsoft, in a luxury Bugaboo with a glistening bow on top were certainly no slouches in *that* department.

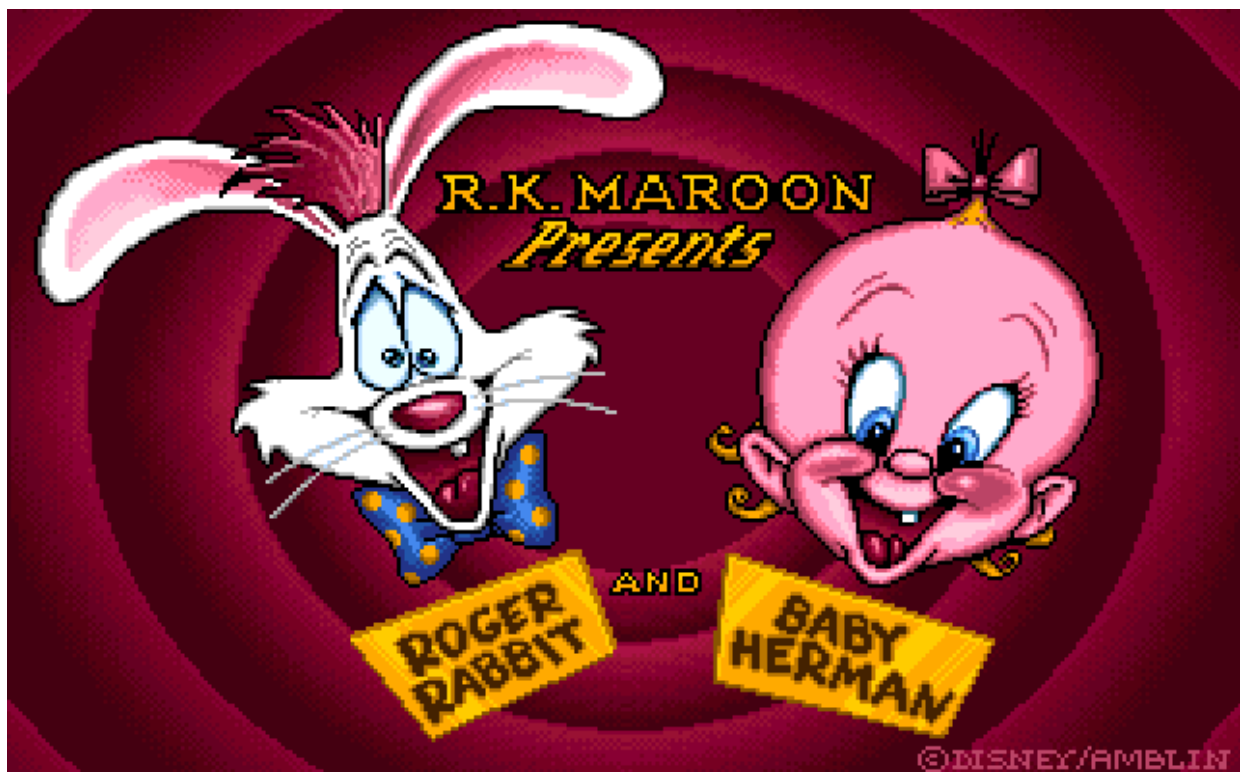


All credit then to Anna Ufnowska for the concept and software verification, coders Colin Reed, Keiron O'Mahoney and Stefan Ufnowski, animator Steve Green, and musician Bjorn Lynne. Not forgetting Anna and her son Luke for providing the voices heard in the intro.

Posting on her game's page over at Lemon Amiga, Anna lends some insight into its origins and development.

"I had the idea for this game after watching those cartoons where a baby is always one step from disaster and a hapless adult/cat/dog has to save it at their own expense. My voice and son Luke in the opening credits. Thanks for kind words. Shortly after this Robert Maxwell fell off a ship and died and Mirrorsoft closed down overnight leaving us high, dry and unpaid. No wonder there's hardly any UK games houses left. In the eighties and early nineties, the UK ruled the gaming world. :)"

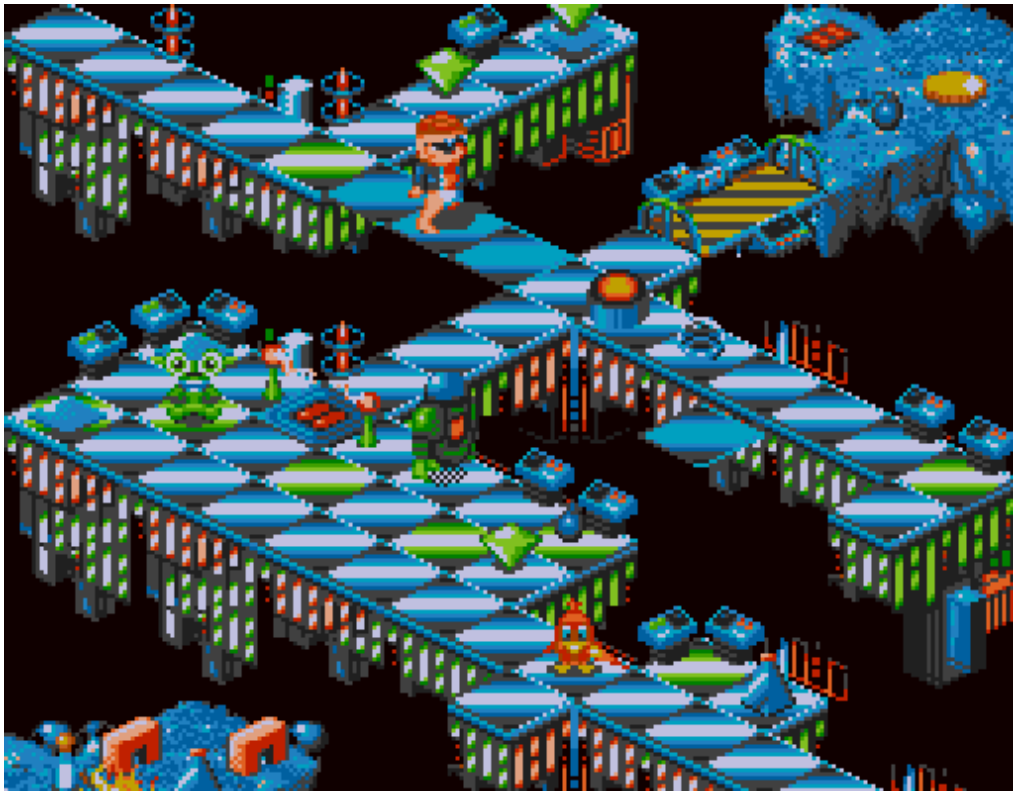
That's why the scenario feels so familiar then. Incidentally, the plot of the Roger Rabbit Amiga game, Hare Raising Havoc, also released in '91, shares the same premise.



Game concept aside, Anna's experience with Mirrorsoft is echoed by a number of well-known developers from the same

era. Sensible Software for one. It must have been heart-wrenching to toil away on a project for so long only to realise you've produced a work of art, yet not been financially compensated for it. Obviously the need to put food on the table is the primary motivation for most developers, no matter how much they have invested in producing an enjoyable, popular game.

On that note, I don't think they quite cracked it. It's an ingenious idea, beautifully executed on the whole, while at the same time too frustrating and perplexing to ever broach being fun. Action-puzzler pros would eagerly have snatched up the gauntlet I'd imagine - I'll look forward to one of them uploading a full play-through to YouTube. For now, I'll have to base my judgement on the small fraction of the game I was able to see.



Stuart Campbell in his review of Brat suggested that Nathan was suspiciously similar to the Bitmap Kid, the star of Magic

Pockets. I don't really see it myself. Sure, both characters wear shades and a baseball cap, that was the definition of cool back in the early '90s. If you wanted to create an on-trend character with which kids could identify, this was the go-to stereotype. Whether or not we the former young sproglets shared their single-minded vision was another matter entirely.



Judging by the game's largely superb reception, none of the critics were especially enamoured with the idea of playing as a baby, yet nonetheless were able to see beyond this aspect in their assessment. Well, all except for Stuart that is, who described Nathan as "the most nauseating little git I've ever come across in twelve years of video gaming. With his nappy, his leather jacket, his ridiculous shades and his baseball cap on sideways he looks like a grown-up member of EMF."

You probably have a good handle on the level of contempt he felt for the little blighter by now. He continued to rant all the same. "The second-rate Bart Simpson clone that is Nathan

irritated me so much that all I wanted to do was see him die, and since getting him killed isn't a hard thing to do, the game's lasting appeal clocks in at a number of seconds. In all fairness, this is a pretty good game in itself, but unless you're a tot more tolerant of precocious toddlers than I am (and that's a big zero on the tolerant-o-meter, statistic fans), it's going to be more than you can stomach."

Winding up his 65% review Stuart concluded, "Beautifully programmed and with lovely sound and graphics, Brat is utterly ruined by a colossal misjudgement of character. If you can identify with Nathan, you're not the kind of person I'd want to meet down the pub on a Saturday night. In fact, I don't even think you should be allowed on the street."



Oh come on, don't take it to heart. He loves you really ...you know, deep down.

Perhaps Stuart had a point; there aren't *that* many games where you get to role-play as a baby. After all, how many kids aspire to regress to their dribbling, dummy-sucking days? Given that Brat only reached number 12 in the Gallup sales charts (in July 1991), before dropping off the radar entirely, I'd say not many. The only other Amiga examples I can think of are Baby Jo and Chuck Rock II. Curiously both received some stellar reviews upon release. Obviously *not* from Stuart.



I take it he won't be buying tickets to wannabe rock star Nathan's next gig. Rumour has it that Nathan grew up and changed his name to Justin Bieber to evade Stuart's wrath. Despite nurturing a successful pop career, Justin had become so attached to his nappy and Babynator gear that he decided to keep them. He's no less irritating and precocious today. Unfortunately now he has a team of minders looking out for

his interests so is unlikely to plummet into a black hole of despair, not *physically* anyhow.

